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ABSTRACT

The importance of providing adequate support systems in educating the visually impaired (VI) child is explored in this sourcebook. It is presented as a guide for the regular classroom teacher. It explains the evolution of various contemporary support systems, pros and cons of various placement systems, and problems of ineffective support systems for regular teachers of mainstreamed VI students. One chapter reviews the history of efforts to integrate VI children into regular schools and classes since the 1950s; defines three support system models (itinerant programs, resource rooms, and cooperative plans); and explains the impact of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Another chapter carefully lists specific advantages and disadvantages of the following placement alternatives for VI students: residential schools for the blind, itinerant programs, resource room programs, and regular classrooms. Also discussed are the roles played by school board, superintendent, principal, teachers, and parents in making placement decisions. A third chapter discusses in detail the possible problems created by an inadequate service delivery system. The discussion, which applies to residential settings as well as classrooms, identifies problem areas including organization of time and personal living space, motor development and ability, social skills, independent living skills, listening and tactile skills, career education, concept development, human sexuality, and leisure and recreation skills. A concluding chapter delineates responsibilities of the regular classroom teacher and the resource teacher for VI children. (AV)

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Important Concerns in the Education of Visually Impaired Children

MAVIS Sourcebook 5

by
Philip H. Hatlen

Philip H. Hatlen is Professor of Education, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California.

Project MAVIS
Social Science Education Consortium, Inc.
Boulder, Colorado

This sourcebook, one of six in a series, was produced by Project MAVIS (Materials Adaptations for Visually Impaired Students in the Social Studies). Other titles in the series are:

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Sourcebook 2: *Encouraging Successful Mainstreaming of the Visually Impaired Child*

Sourcebook 3: *Teaching the Visually Impaired Child in the Regular Classroom*

Sourcebook 4: *Social Studies for the Visually Impaired Child*

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Project sponsor

Social Science Education Consortium, Inc.

855 Broadway

Boulder, Colorado 80302

(303) 492-8154

Project staff

James E. Davis, director

Sharryl Hawke, associate director

Madge Leslie, staff associate

Laurel Singleton, staff associate

John Hoge, evaluator

Cindy Ellis, secretary

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Project MAVIS
Materials Adaptations for Visually
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1. Introduction

With all the attention given the mandates of Public Law 94-142—the Education for All Handicapped Children Act—many people believe that current efforts represent the first attempt to mainstream disabled children into regular classrooms. This is not the case, however, for disabled children have been successfully enrolled in regular classrooms for a number of years. This is particularly true of visually impaired children, many of whom have been placed in regular classrooms for the past 20 or more years.

Over the past 20 years, two generalizations about regular classroom teachers who have worked successfully with visually impaired children have developed. First, it appears that a good teacher of children with normal vision is often a good teacher of children with impaired vision. The creativity, imagination, and standards of excellence which make a classroom an exciting place for nonhandicapped children can also be applied to adapting and creating a learning situation appropriate for the visually impaired child.

The second generalization is that adjustments and adaptations which make learning more appropriate for the visually impaired child also enhance and enrich the learning experiences of sighted children. The teacher who verbalizes while he or she is writing on the chalkboard, for example, is activating another sensory modality for all the children, even though the primary objective may be to convey the written information on the chalkboard to the child who cannot see.

I strongly agree with both of these generalizations. But I would add a third. Classroom teachers who have successfully worked with visually impaired children in their regular classrooms know their own limitations in fully serving the visually impaired child. They know that their success depends not only on their own skill, creativity, adaptivity, and sensitivity, but also on the support system available to them.

No educational program for visually impaired children will be as successful as it should be unless it includes, as a member of an educational team, a fully trained, qualified, capable teacher of visually impaired children. A clear delineation of the responsibilities of the regular classroom teacher and those of the teacher of the visually impaired is critical to the success of the educational program.

The responsibilities of the classroom teacher should be similar to those he or she assumes for the other children in the class. The responsibilities of the teacher of the visually impaired should include acting as a support person for the regular classroom teacher by interpreting the effects of visual loss on learning, providing appropriate educational materials and equipment, and giving supplementary assistance for educational experiences, as well as directly instructing the visually impaired child in those areas of education, growth, and development in which special training is needed as a direct result of the vision loss. These areas, while not generally considered part of the regular classroom curriculum, are crucial to the ultimate independent functioning of the visually impaired student. These responsibilities have not always been clearly defined, however. In many situations, the teacher of the visually impaired has been viewed as nothing more than an academic tutor who supplements the experiences provided the visually impaired child in the regular classroom.

The aim of this publication is to demonstrate clearly to regular classroom teachers that a support system that provides nothing more than this is inappropriate and inadequate and will result in tragic consequences for the visually impaired child. Fully understanding this statement requires understanding (1) how the support systems available today evolved, (2) what the advantages and disadvantages of various placement options for visually impaired children are and how the best placement decision can be made, and (3) what can result when the support system provided to a classroom teacher with a mainstreamed visually impaired student is not functioning properly. Each of these topics is addressed in a subsequent section of this sourcebook. The final section outlines appropriate responsibilities of the regular classroom teacher and the teacher of the visually impaired and describes what you, as the classroom teacher, should insist on being available from the support system.

Fortunately, the regular classroom teacher will in most cases not need to stress the issues raised in this publication because the special teacher will already be aware of her or his responsibilities and will be carrying them out as a supplementary portion of the regular elementary or secondary school curriculum. If this is not the case in your school, however, this sourcebook will provide you with the information needed to work for a system that will function more effectively for both you and the visually impaired child.

2. How We Got Where We Are Today

To fully understand and appreciate the current status of educational services to visually impaired children, you, the classroom teacher, must have some understanding of where we have been and how we got where we are today. The current emphasis on the placement of disabled children in regular classrooms for the maximum time possible is believed by many to be a recent educational innovation brought on by legislation and demands by parents and educators. There is really nothing new about this trend at all.

Development of the "Integration" Trend

In the 1950s, approximately 90 percent of the identified visually impaired children in the United States attended private and public residential schools for the blind, but by the mid-1960s, 90 percent of the identified visually impaired students in the United States were attending public and private day schools. Most of them were enrolled for at least part of each day in regular classrooms. Thus the trend toward retaining visually impaired students in their own communities and providing an educational program as nearly like programs available to sighted children as possible began 20 years ago.

This trend was based on two assumptions which have since been proven to be correct. First, it was assumed that most visually impaired children could receive a satisfactory education in the regular classroom with sighted peers. The second assumption was that if this approach to education of the visually impaired was to work effectively, it would require a sophisticated support system under the direction of a highly specialized teacher of visually impaired children.

Three types of support systems were advocated. One was an *itinerant program*, in which visually impaired children stayed in their local communities, attended neighborhood schools, and were visited on a periodic basis by an itinerant teacher of the visually impaired. This specialized teacher provided some services directly to the student, but was primarily responsible for consulting with classroom teachers, supervisors, and administrators regarding the educational needs of the visually impaired child in the regular classroom.

The second support system was called a *resource room*. In this approach, visually impaired children were brought to a centrally located elementary or secondary school, sometimes a considerable distance from their homes. In this school was a resource room for visually impaired students which housed a special teacher of the visually impaired and all the materials and equipment necessary for successful placement of students in regular classrooms.

The third model was called a *cooperative plan*, in which a classroom for visually impaired children was established in a regular elementary or secondary school. As the specialized teacher determined their readiness, children were moved out of the special classroom into a regular classroom in that school.

The ultimate goal in all three models was the successful placement of the visually impaired child in a regular classroom. It was seen as extremely important that the visually impaired child identify the regular classroom as her or his home base. This concept required a close and sensitive relationship between the child, the teacher of the visually impaired, and the classroom teacher.

These three program models *have* been successful in enhancing the placement of visually impaired children in regular classrooms, so successful in fact that our colleagues in other areas of special education are now using them. We educators of the visually impaired are proud of this fact and are pleased that at last other disabled students are receiving a more appropriate education, one similar to that which has been offered to most visually impaired children for many years. Public Law 94-142 is providing the impetus for a growing awareness in all areas of special education of the disabled student's need for what might best be called "normalization."

Impact of Public Law 94-142

We in education of the visually impaired do not anticipate significant or sweeping changes in education services for the visually impaired as a result of the passage of Public Law 94-142. However, I would be remiss if I did not discuss at least briefly the most important piece of legislation in education of exceptional children in the United States. Public Law 94-142 is appropriately named the Education for *All* Handicapped Children Act. It calls for each state to search and serve—to search for every child with special needs and to serve each child appropriately. This provision alone represents a landmark in the development of educational programs for disabled children.

The law does not, however, end with the requirement that every child be served; it calls for each child to be served in the "least restrictive environment." Official definitions of this term have created problems for some of us concerned with providing visually impaired children with the most appropriate education.

"Least restrictive environment" has been defined by the Federal government (and, incidentally, by the State of California) as that environment which provides each child with the most contact with nonhandicapped children. I object strongly to this definition because I think it will result in a situation which was never intended by the Congress of the United States. My definition of "least restrictive environment" is the environment which least restricts the child's learning. Some visually impaired children, if placed in an itinerant program, would be attempting to function in the most restrictive environment in terms of their ability to learn. True, they would spend considerable time with sighted children, but it would be a frustrating, restrictive experience for them. Therefore, I hope that implementation of Public Law 94-142 does not result in children being placed in a regular classroom even though they are not ready for or do not belong in that setting.

Another aspect of Public Law 94-142 which is very exciting is the provision that every child must have an individualized educational program (IEP). An IEP is a very carefully written document which states the child's strengths and makes provisions for short- and long-term goals in terms of the child's needs. It calls for careful assessment and objectives which are appropriate and realistic for each child. IEP's provide two important dimensions to our programs. First, teachers are now required to be very specific about their goals and objectives for children; this will require some careful assessment and planning for the future. Second, the IEP represents the first time that most teachers of the visually impaired have been held accountable for their teaching.

One more element in Public Law 94-142 is very important: parents have rights under this law which they have not had in the past. Parents are to assist teachers in writing IEP's and must cosign the IEP with the teacher. If the parents object to the IEP, they have a right to a fair and impartial hearing. If parents object to the placement of their child, they have due process rights under this law. At long last, parents are being recognized as vital to the successful education of their children. We may, indeed, be coming to a time when the term "parents as partners" will be accepted and recognized by all teachers of visually impaired children.

It is too early to assess the real effects of Public Law 94-142 on education and educational programs for visually impaired children, but many aspects of this law promise to provide better and more appropriate services.

3. Educational Placement Alternatives— What Are They and Who Decides?

It will be to your advantage as a regular classroom teacher to understand more fully some of the educational placement alternatives available for visually impaired students.

Residential Schools for the Blind

Let's first discuss residential schools for the blind. For many years—long before public day schools recognized and met a responsibility for education of the visually impaired—residential schools existed and thrived, meeting many of the social and educational needs of visually impaired students. Such schools, in which children are enrolled in classes with other visually impaired children of the same age and/or academic standing, exist in almost every state in the United States. Enrollment often requires that children attend school hundreds of miles from their homes.

For many years schools for the blind selectively admitted children who could profit from a thorough, comprehensive academic education. For grades K-9, their academic standards were equal to those of public day schools. In many states, however, residential schools chose not to offer an educational service for grades 10-12, believing that a small residential school for the blind could not provide as comprehensive an educational experience as could a larger high school in the community, and that most visually impaired students of high school age were ready to begin a move into the community and away from the relative segregation of the residential school.

Within the past 20 years, many residential schools have changed their objectives and roles. As local school districts have become more capable of providing appropriate educational services, residential schools have found themselves in the position of meeting other needs in the total population of visually impaired children. The result has been that many schools for the blind now serve primarily a population of multihandicapped, visually impaired students, thus providing an excellent complement to the capabilities of local school districts. In addition, residential schools are filling many other special roles, such as providing temporary educational services for the newly blinded adolescent, education in specific skill areas, etc.

The advantages of schools for the blind are numerous; these include:

1. Schools for the blind are specifically geared to offering educational, social, and physical experiences to visually impaired children. They can thus redirect, adjust, and add curriculum specific to the needs of visually impaired students.

2. Schools for the blind can provide intensive 24-hour coverage for children whose home life may not be conducive to optimal growth and development.

3. Schools for the blind can more conveniently provide educational experiences in nonacademic areas, since they in effect have a "captive audience."

4. Many classes in schools for the blind have a low pupil/teacher ratio. Children who might not do well in a large class in a public school setting may learn more effectively in a residential school class with as few as three or four students. Hence, individualizing instruction may in many instances be easier in a residential school.

Disadvantages of placing the visually impaired child in a school for the blind include the following:

1. In most cases, children attending schools for the blind are removed from their families and homes, sometimes for many hundreds of miles. Continuity between home and school may be minimal, if not nonexistent.

2. Schools for the blind are segregated, with most activities occurring within the confines of the school. Although the extent to which this may inhibit assimilation into the sighted community is not known, it is suspected that such isolation from the "mainstream" may create problems in later years regarding employment and socialization within the sighted community.

Itinerant Programs

Itinerant programs also have their advantages and disadvantages, which you, as the classroom teacher, should know about. The advantages of an itinerant program include the following:

1. The visually impaired child served by an itinerant teacher of the visually impaired remains in her or his home community and attends the neighborhood school. The potential for school friends also being neighborhood friends is therefore present.

2. Itinerant programs require that the visually impaired child spend a significant amount of time in a regular classroom. In fact, the only time a child may be removed from a regular classroom is when the itinerant teacher visits. In some programs where itinerant teachers carry caseloads of as many as 20 students in schools separated by as much as 60 to 75 miles, the itinerant teacher may visit a particular school only once or twice a week for an hour or two. This means that the child is removed from the regular classroom very seldom.

Disadvantages of itinerant programs include:

1. The itinerant teacher sometimes does not have enough time to work with classroom teachers, administrators, and others at local school sites on ways to enhance the mainstreaming of the visually impaired child. The result is infrequent and perhaps inadequate inservice training of local school staff.
2. The itinerant teacher has insufficient time to spend with individual visually impaired children. As the ability to identify specific needs of visually impaired children caused by their visual loss has improved, we have found that some of the needs of visually impaired children will be difficult to meet in most itinerant programs.
3. Itinerant teachers may in some instances drive more than they teach.
4. Visually impaired students who are developmentally delayed, multi-handicapped, or have "gaps" in learning or development are difficult, if not impossible, to serve in an itinerant program.
5. Unrealistic expectations may be placed on the classroom teacher.

Resource Room Programs

Historically, classroom teachers serving visually impaired students seem to appreciate certain aspects of the resource room plan over others. Let's explore some of the reasons why:

1. The visually impaired child theoretically has the best of both worlds: she or he is enrolled and actively participating in a regular classroom, but within the same school has access to a room and a teacher designed to meet his or her specific needs. The two teachers can thus make arrangements so that the visually impaired child's visits to the resource room can occur whenever the activities in the regular classroom are not conducive to optimal learning for that child.
2. Educational materials and equipment which the visually impaired child needs in a regular classroom are readily available. In addition, materials developed by the classroom teacher can be immediately available for the visually impaired child in whatever mode (braille, large print, recording) is needed.
3. Communication between administrators, classroom teachers, and the teacher of the visually impaired is easily established.
4. The unique needs of the visually impaired child can be easily met, since the special teacher is readily available. Such skills as braille writing with a slate, typewriting, listening, and independent living can be planned and offered in addition to the curriculum presented in the regular classroom.
5. For the functionally blind, potentially braille-using child in the primary grades, the special teacher and the classroom teacher can work more closely together in providing a good reading program.

The disadvantages of resource room programs include:

1. A child may travel an extensive distance to attend the school in which the resource room is located. Consequently, school friends and neighborhood friends may not always be the same. After-school activities are difficult to arrange, since transportation arrangements may require that the visually impaired child leave the school immediately after classes end.

2. Parents are not as readily accessible to the classroom and resource teachers because of distance from the school.

3. A resource room may result in an unhealthy clustering of many visually impaired children within a small elementary or secondary school. Since it is important within the philosophy of mainstreaming that visually impaired children establish relationships with sighted contemporaries, there is a danger that this clustering could result in less socialization between visually impaired and sighted children.

Regular Classrooms

What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of placement in the regular classroom with the support of either a resource or itinerant teacher? For the time being, let's explore the placement of the visually impaired child in a regular classroom assuming that a strong support system is available.

It is important in this discussion to realize that the advantages of mainstreaming visually impaired children were not identified as a result of carefully designed and executed research. There is no data base for mainstreaming. Educators of the visually impaired, parents of visually impaired children, regular classroom teachers, and administrators based decisions on the mainstreaming of visually impaired children on educated guesses. History has proved that in many cases these guesses were correct, but it must be understood that no one really knew from the beginning what advantages would result from placing visually impaired children in regular classrooms. Advantages of such a placement are now believed to include the following:

1. Visually impaired children are living in the community, in their own homes, with their parents, and are attending school with sighted classmates. They are literally living among the people with whom they are going to have to spend the rest of their lives. This is considered an advantage over segregated specialized training, which may result in the visually impaired student's learning to cope in an unreal world.

2. Socialization skills and appropriate behavior can be learned by living with nonhandicapped contemporaries.

3. Education offered in the mainstream is more comprehensive and appropriate to the needs of all children in the community and is therefore also more appropriate for the visually impaired child.

4. Stigmatization of the disabled will decrease and, perhaps, disappear entirely as sighted adults and children learn that visually impaired children are more alike than different from the rest of the population.

5. Minimizing the effects of the impairment by placement in the mainstream may minimize the effects of the impairment on the ego development of the child.

The major disadvantages of regular classroom placement are:

1. All of the advantages outlined above are educated guesses rather than facts. We have no proof that placement in the mainstream assists in the development of positive socialization skills. Nor do we have solid evidence that the curriculum offered in a regular classroom is more desirable than the curriculum offered in a residential school, for example.

2. Close observers of mainstreamed programs for the visually impaired suggest that children served in these programs often have no peers or role models. In other words, the visually impaired child may well grow up without meeting other visually impaired persons. While some believe that this is an advantage, others are convinced that the lack of models can be a significant disadvantage in terms of the child's realizing that there are others like him or her. Also, many educators consider adult role models who have been socially and economically successful to be extremely important for the visually impaired child.

3. The visually impaired child's specialized educational and developmental needs may be ignored in favor of maintaining the child in the regular classroom for the majority of each day. As the profession of education of the visually impaired has grown and learned, a very interesting phenomenon has occurred. It is now being recognized that a careful balance between specialized learning and regular classroom learning is desirable for all visually impaired children and necessary for many. It would probably be a serious mistake and a definite disadvantage to most visually impaired children if their special teacher was not available for regular instruction to meet their unique learning needs, or if regular classroom placement was so extensive that time for teaching the specialized needs was omitted.

Who Makes Placement Decisions?

Does mainstreaming mean that you, the classroom teacher, will walk into your room on the first day of school and discover several disabled children? Let's hope not; let's hope that careful preplanning is done and that you are provided inservice training to prepare you to teach these children. Let's hope that you are involved in the placement decisions.

Some educators say that classroom teachers should have a choice as to whether to accept a visually impaired child into their classrooms. It is understood that all of us have emotional reactions to disabilities which may be beyond our intellectual control. Some classroom teachers may,

on a personal level, be unable to deal with any kind of disability or, more specifically, with a visual impairment. This fact should be recognized and accepted. On the other hand, I question the feasibility of allowing classroom teachers in all situations to reserve the option of accepting or rejecting a visually impaired child.

I also strongly object to the approach used in many school systems: the request for placement is left up to the special teacher or the principal. A moral and legal commitment must be made by the highest governing body in every school district (usually a school board) to serve disabled students in the most appropriate educational setting. If this setting is the regular classroom, then the school board must convey its decision to the superintendent, who must then implement such a decision through his or her supervisors, principals, and other administrators. In other words, it should be school district policy that whenever feasible and appropriate the visually impaired child be educated in a regular classroom and that the regular classroom teacher be thoroughly informed and ready for such an assignment. This means that we must develop and disseminate a comprehensive and efficient inservice training system for regular classroom teachers on their role in working with visually impaired students.

What then should be the ideal process for enrolling a visually impaired child in a regular classroom? One approach might be as follows:

1. The school board develops and confirms a policy for inclusion of disabled children in regular classrooms whenever appropriate and feasible.
2. The superintendent implements this policy by informing principals, supervisors, and other administrators that the policy will be carried out.
3. Principals and other administrators inform all classroom teachers that such a policy is in effect.

4. Arrangements are made within the district or through a neighboring university to provide inservice training for all classroom teachers and administrators regarding exceptional children. All categories of exceptionality are included in this inservice training; particular emphasis is given to handicaps requiring the most extensive development of understanding and competencies among these professionals.

5. Visually impaired children in need of special education are identified through an intensive child-find process.

6. The school district employs one or more teachers of the visually impaired who have been thoroughly trained to serve as a support to regular classroom teachers and to provide instruction to meet the specialized needs of visually impaired students.

7. Each visually impaired child is carefully assessed by a team including administrators, psychologists, guidance workers, nurses, ophthalmologists, optometrists, and other professionals who have information regarding the child. The teacher of the visually impaired acts as the team captain. The team also includes the child's family in a major role, and if appropriate, the child.

8. As a result of this assessment, two decisions are made. First, the child's educational placement is carefully selected based on the child's individual needs and the available placement alternatives. At this point it would be ideal for the district to have available as alternative service delivery systems itinerant services, resource room services, and self-contained classroom services. The second decision involves establishing the specific learning needs of the child.

9. The child is placed—with the approval of parents and school district personnel—in the most appropriate educational placement available.

10. The child's success and progress in this educational placement are continually monitored so that adjustments and changes can be made as the child's needs change.

It must be stressed that there is no best educational system for all visually impaired students. There is a best program for a particular child, at a particular time in his or her life. Within a single school district there will probably be visually impaired children who need a self-contained classroom, some who will benefit from a resource room, and still others who will be appropriately placed in itinerant programs. There may also be students who can best be served in a residential school; this option should always be open to the assessment team. The key to successful placement of the visually impaired child is to have all options available so that each child is appropriately placed and can be moved to other service delivery systems within the district as needs change.

A second key to the success of appropriate placement is the adequacy of the support systems provided by the special teacher and others. I firmly believe that placement of a visually impaired child in your classroom should not result in your needing to spend inordinate amounts of time with this individual child. If you find that you are giving more individual time to the visually impaired child than any other child in your classroom, you should consult with your support system to be certain that you are receiving appropriate services and should question the service delivery system selected for the child.

4. Consequences of an Inadequate Service Delivery System

Many of the thoughts presented in the remainder of this publication have developed over the past 7 years, during which I have been very involved with the Living Skills Center for the Visually Handicapped in San Pablo, California. This small agency was founded in July 1972 as a postsecondary program for blind young adults who were having difficulty in the transition from home and school to the community. Many of the blind high school graduates leaving school in 1972 had attended regular public schools. To our surprise and disappointment, many did not move out into the community, did not become employed, and did not go on to higher education; instead, they lived at home with their families and seemed to have very few directions or ideas for the future.

As the staff of the Living Skills Center for the Visually Handicapped began to work individually with blind young adults in curriculum areas considered to be important for functioning as an adult, they made some interesting discoveries. They discovered, for example, that most of these young people had no preparation in such basic skills as personal grooming, care of clothing, selection of clothing, cooking, apartment management, apartment cleaning, and financial management. The staff found that these skills were relatively easy to teach through sequential curricula which enabled most of the participants to live effectively on their own.

However, some real surprises were also encountered. For one thing, it was found that even the academic education that these young people received was far from adequate. Many young people who had had as much as 3 years of high school mathematics, usually receiving A and B grades, could not make change for a dollar. We also found that many of these young people were dependent, compliant, and docile individuals, who had been so programmed that they were almost incapable of making independent decisions regarding their lives.

We also found that few of these students had learned good basic communication skills such as signature writing and business telephoning. Few had any knowledge about career education, nor had they received any vocational preparation. We found that concept development was limited, as were organizational skills. Knowledge of human sexuality was almost nonexistent. Few of the young adults had recreational or leisure time activities other than passive, listening-related activities.

All of us who have worked with visually impaired students have been proud of the growth and development of public day school programs. Many children have never set foot in a residential school, but have spent their entire elementary and secondary experiences in regular classrooms with sighted children. We have been proud of the fact that we provided a support system which meant that each child was served by a highly trained, eminently qualified teacher of the visually impaired.

Why did we find, then, that many of the young people educated in regular classrooms were graduating from high school with so little personal motivation and so little responsibility for their own independence? Some of us have decided that it is possible that many of our teachers of visually impaired children—and perhaps regular classroom teachers as well—have made life extremely easy for visually impaired students. Responsibility for their own actions and decision-making opportunities have been taken away. A policy of guaranteeing against failure has been established, often meaning that the teacher does the work, while the student gets the grade.

Three teachers at the Living Skills Center—Pat Canter, Betsy Hatlen, and Mike Cole—have graphically described the results of this policy:

One of the things we have found since the early days of the Living Skills Center for the Visually Handicapped is that many, many of our students lack experience in organizing their own lives, both in terms of time and of space. The all-pervasiveness of this particular lack, we gradually came to realize, has a staggering effect upon the lives of these young people.

Organization of Space. We can only speculate about why students do not know how to organize things in a given space, but the effects of this lack of knowledge we can relate with authority. When students entering the Skills Center are faced with the task of unpacking their possessions in their new apartment, they are, more often than not, completely overwhelmed. Many times their first reaction is that everything will, of course, go in their bedroom. Exploring other rooms to find out size, location of windows, heater, intercom, refrigerator, cupboards, etc. must be encouraged by staff. That the stereo can go in the living room, or that towels can be put in the linen closet, or that dishes fit most conveniently into kitchen cupboards does not occur to them. Many of our students have completely empty living rooms for months. Even after we assist students with this initial organization, we find the problem cropping up again and again. I have, for example, found a potato chip bag in a laundry hamper, cookies on a closet shelf, and important mail in a kitchen drawer stuck under spatulas and wooden spoons. I have seen students whose shoes are spread all over the floor of an apartment spend angry and frustrated hours searching for a matching pair—and they have no ideas whatsoever about how

to alleviate this problem.

Organizing a kitchen, even for students who are sophisticated academically, can be a whole new world chock full of problems and hard decisions. Where does the dishpan go? Where does the garbage can go? Where does the food go? Where does everything go, for goodness sakes? And how am I going to remember where I put all these things? Many times students become very angry with us for not taking this enormous problem away from them. Yet, when forced to use their common sense, most gradually learn to make logical decisions about such matters.

Organization of Time. A student at the Skills Center has a mobility lesson and a living skills lesson every day. However, there are also large blocks of time during the week when there are no specific activities required by the staff, nor do students necessarily come in contact with staff during these hours. Students are expected to make intelligent use of this time by practicing cleaning skills, cooking skills, grocery shopping, laundry, paying bills, and in short, working on accomplishing whatever tasks are necessary for the successful independent management of themselves and their households. We are, as much as is feasible, telling them that we refuse to organize all of their time for them. Again, the initial reaction is often anger. At first, students want to literally hand their lives to staff members and are angry when we will not decide what they should do first—laundry or the breakfast dishes. Other students will sit and listen to the radio until the trash smells so bad that it finally occurs to them that no one is going to take the trash out unless they take that responsibility on themselves.

In the beginning, organizing a whole day seems to be an enormous task. Learning how to plan ahead is something our students have not experienced. Often they assume that if they have not planned their time correctly, someone on staff will bail them out. For example, we might get a question like, "I just finished my laundry and I didn't realize it was so late. Now if I have to take the bus, I'll be late for my doctor's appointment. Can you take me, please?" Or perhaps someone didn't quite make it to the bank to deposit his/her check before the bank closed. Just a few days ago several students went to a basketball game alone. Halfway there, they realized that no one had thought to bring the all-important radio, but there was no time to go back and get one. Obviously, there are real consequences to these situations. No, we will not take you to your doctor's appointment; and if one of your checks bounces, you will have to pay a \$4.00 fee to the bank; and trying to follow a basketball game with no radio is not much fun. Later on when more and more activities are added to a student's regimen in the form of job observations, etc., we have seen students break down

and cry at being "expected to do too many things in one day." Yet these expectations are actually very few in comparison to those of any competitive employer.

From our observations we can only conclude that most congenitally blind children have nearly all of their time and materials organized for them, both at home and at school. If this is not so, then why do most of our students have no idea how to order books from the Library of Congress? Why is it that they have no idea how to order tickets for the symphony or how to hang up their clothes or how to do the hundreds of other tasks required in order to be a responsible, independent adult? Certainly it is not because they cannot learn; we watch them learning every day. Teaching the tasks is not the main problem—the problem is assisting students in getting over the fear that they cannot do the tasks and sometimes in getting over the attitude that they should not have to do the tasks since they have never had to do them before. In light of the above information, it might be well for parents and teachers of young blind children to look closely at what they are doing with their children. Every time you button a blind child's coat, every time you open his/her milk carton, cut his meat, make his bed, order his braille paper, open his mail, stamp his envelope, or sign his name—you are robbing that child of another experience he needs to have in order to live an independent life. It may take more of your time in the beginning, but the rewards will be greater in the end.

Our living skills checklist is available at the following address:

Living Skills Center for the Visually Handicapped
2444 Road 20, #C-105
San Pablo, California 94806*

Those of us who have had experience at the Living Skills Center for the Visually Handicapped have been suggesting to teachers that they need to take a close, hard look at the products of the programs in which they are teaching. We suggest to elementary-level resource and itinerant teachers that they must, in part, take some responsibility for the functioning level of visually impaired young adults who were once their students. If nothing else I say has any relevance for any of you, I hope this one suggestion will be helpful: look at the products of your program. This act will tell you more about your successes and failures than any other process.

What does all this mean to you, the regular classroom teacher with a visually impaired child in your classroom? It is not meant to suggest that you have a significant responsibility for teaching nonacademic skills to visually impaired children. It does mean that you should be aware that sighted children learn many skills and concepts incidentally, based

*Pat Canter, Betsy Hatlen, and Mike Cole, "Living Skills," *California Transcriber*, vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 1977), p. 115. Used by permission.

primarily on visual observation and mimicking the behavior of adults. If a child does not have the opportunity to visually observe the behavior of others, these things must obviously be taught.

The teaching of these skills and concepts should not be primarily the responsibility of the regular classroom teacher. If you are aware of the potential problems in learning and growth development of a visually impaired child, you may of course find opportunities to provide experiences in your regular classroom. But the major responsibility for assessing needs and developing experiences to meet these needs falls on the teacher of the visually impaired. Because you may have the most contact with the visually impaired child and may, in fact, know him or her best, you will perhaps need to provide recommendations and suggestions to the teacher of the visually impaired: "Bill seems to need some help in personal grooming. We do not have the time or the facilities to provide this in a regular classroom; can you assume responsibility for this?" "Mary seems to have difficulty in interacting with sighted children. There seem to be some social skills which she is lacking. Will you, please, help with this?" Such statements to the teacher of the visually impaired will alert him or her to areas of needs which may otherwise go unnoticed.

The following list of areas of learning crucial to the optimal growth and development of a visually impaired student will alert you to areas of need which may require attention.

1. *Motor development and mobility.* Young visually impaired children may have difficulty in gross and fine motor development. Awareness of one's body and space and control of one's motoric actions are important precursors to good independent travel. As the classroom teacher, you may not have enough time or knowledge to assist in this area. The teacher of the visually impaired should assume the responsibility for assessing motor development and planning a program of development or remediation which will assure growth and development in this area. The teacher of the visually impaired may assume this responsibility personally or refer the child to a perceptual motor specialist.

2. *Independent living skills.* The teacher of the visually impaired should assume responsibility for a gradual, sequential growth in independent living skills, such as personal grooming and hygiene, cleaning, awareness of community services, and financial management. Responsibility in this area should be shared with parents, but parental involvement does not absolve the teacher of the visually impaired from responsibility.

3. *Social skills.* Lack of awareness of such basics as how to participate in conversational give and take, enter into group discussions, use appropriate facial expressions, gestures, and body language, deal with strangers, interpret one's own visual impairment to others, and develop a positive, strong self-image are potential problem areas in the development of social skills. You may find many ways of assisting in the acquisi-

tion of social skills in the regular classroom. However, the teacher of the visually impaired must also be intimately involved in order to assure optimal growth and development of the child.

4. *Listening skills.* You probably provide many opportunities for all children in your classroom to develop listening skills. It must be emphasized, however, that listening skills play a crucial role in the learning of visually impaired students. The visually impaired child may need to begin a sequential course of study in the development of listening skills as early in the grades as possible. This may be the responsibility of the teacher of the visually impaired.

5. *Tactile skills.* Just as visually impaired children do not naturally develop good listening skills, they also may not naturally develop good tactile skills. Use of tactile skills is not confined to the reading of braille. Visually impaired children need to be taught to use their fingers and hands well in order to explore, identify, and appreciate all tangible materials in their environments. A teacher of visually impaired students is trained in the area of teaching tactile skills and must assume responsibility in this area.

6. *Vision utilization.* We have known for many years that children who are partially seeing can be taught to better use their remaining vision. Curriculum materials for teaching visual efficiency are available. You can assist in this area by keeping the teacher of the visually impaired fully informed about the visual functioning of the child in the regular classroom. The teacher of the visually impaired will then be responsible for developing the program for better visual utilization, if appropriate.

7. *Career education.* This rapidly developing area of curriculum is crucial for visually impaired students, who do not have access to the same amount of visual information regarding the life style, employment, and social behavior of adults as sighted students do. Within the context of your own career education program in the regular classroom, you may be able to provide many important experiences for the visually impaired child. However, it will also probably be necessary for the teacher of the visually impaired to provide some specific instruction in the areas of career awareness and exploration.

8. *Concept development.* Early concept development often occurs in a natural unstructured way for curious, exploring, sighted children. Such may not be the case for the visually impaired child, who may receive very limited information beyond the reach of his or her arms. The visually impaired child may need to be specifically taught some concepts. For example, the term "long" may mean the length of a piece of string, the distance a person travels, or the time involved to eat a meal. Concept development may be an important area of curriculum which will involve instruction provided by the teacher of the visually impaired.

9. *Organization skills.* Organization of time and space has already been discussed. The teacher of the visually impaired may need to provide

some specific instruction in this area.

10. *Human sexuality.* Again because of lack of visual information, visually impaired children may have a limited or distorted impression of sexuality—both their own and others'. Instruction outside the realm of the regular classroom may be needed in this important area.

11. *Leisure and recreation skills.* If you are a teacher in upper elementary grades or high school, you know that team games are very popular. What does a visually impaired child do while classmates are playing a game of volleyball, kickball, or baseball? More often than not, the visually impaired child is relegated to the role of score-keeper and plays a minimal role in the game; this does nothing more than teach the child some basic awareness of the rules of the game. The teacher of the visually impaired must be concerned about the development of leisure and recreational skills which will have carryover value into adulthood. Too often, visually impaired adults have as their leisure time repertoire such passive activities as listening to the radio, television, or record player. Exposure to and learning about active recreational activities while still in school may provide the visually impaired child with the awareness and motivation to continue these activities into adulthood.

Although not necessarily complete, this list illustrates that the visually impaired child's needs cannot all be met in the regular classroom. Most of the areas listed will need to be taught during pull-out time from the regular classroom. Teachers of the visually impaired who are aware of these critical needs are reconsidering the extent to which visually impaired children spend their time in regular classrooms. Although providing the comprehensive program needed by visually impaired students may require that the child be in a regular classroom for half a day or longer, a certain portion of every day may need to be spent individually with the teacher of the visually impaired in order to gain some additional learning experiences.

Two factors are inhibiting the reconsideration of the amount of time spent in the regular classroom. The first factor is a positive one: the regular classroom teacher often objects to the visually impaired student's being removed from the mainstream because the child appears to be gaining so much from being with sighted peers. This attitude is praiseworthy, since it represents the fundamental philosophy of placement of visually impaired children in regular classrooms. However, by making you aware of some of the unique needs which visually impaired children may have, we hope that you will realize that the time spent outside the regular classroom may be just as important to the child as the time spent with you.

A second factor inhibiting the development of the best balance between regular classroom and specialized teaching is the attitude of many teachers of the visually impaired who continue to believe that the best possible education occurs in the regular classroom. Even teachers of the

visually impaired may be unaware of some of the unique needs of visually impaired students. As an informed classroom teacher, you may have to assume some responsibility in assuring that a program which meets all the needs of the child is developed.

5. Defining Role Responsibilities

Throughout this sourcebook, several comments have been made about certain tasks being the responsibility of a particular member of the educational team. By now you may be wondering, "Just what is my responsibility as the regular classroom teacher? What is the responsibility of the teacher of the visually impaired? What are the responsibilities of other ancillary personnel available to the school district? What are the responsibilities of parents and other family members?" It would take much time and space to provide answers to all of these questions. Let me simply suggest to you your responsibilities and those of the teacher of the visually impaired.

The classroom teacher should:

1. Require that the school district provide some inservice training regarding visual impairment.
2. Be certain that his or her own attitudes toward visual impairment are healthy and realistic.
3. Be the model for acceptance and understanding in the regular classroom.
4. Maintain standards for the visually impaired child which are equal to those set for other children.
5. Provide a setting which will result in the optimal opportunities for academic and social interaction between sighted and visually impaired children.
6. Be comfortable with the support system provided by the teacher of the visually impaired and other ancillary services within the school.
7. Be observant so that specific needs of the child are recognized and shared with the teacher of the visually impaired.
8. Participate fully in the implementation of the individualized educational plan.
9. Preplan to such an extent that appropriate educational materials are always available.
10. Be comfortable with the fact that the child will need to leave the regular classroom for educational experiences which cannot be provided with sighted students.

The classroom teacher should not:

1. Accept a visually impaired child into a classroom unless he or she has been provided appropriate inservice experience.

2. Accept the visually impaired child into a regular classroom if support services will not be provided.

3. Accept the visually impaired child into the regular classroom if the school system has not provided for appropriate instructional materials.

4. Consider the visually impaired child as one who belongs to somebody else in terms of educational services.

5. Assume the visually impaired child cannot compete and participate in a regular classroom.

6. Assume responsibilities for meeting needs of the visually impaired child directly related to the disability, resulting in spending inordinate time with the visually impaired child at the expense of other students in the classroom.

The teacher of the visually impaired should:

1. Provide appropriate inservice training of regular classroom teachers, administrators, and others in the district.

2. Recognize and accept the role as advocate for the visually impaired child in a regular classroom.

3. Provide all necessary instructional materials and equipment which will allow the visually impaired child to function in a regular classroom at the optimal level.

4. Provide for comprehensive and thorough assessment of the visually impaired child's needs and communicate these to the regular classroom teacher and others.

5. Assure that the parents are full participants in the educational experiences of the child.

6. Be available to the regular classroom teacher for consultation and assistance whenever needed.

7. Assure that ongoing assessment occurs so that the child is receiving educational services in the most appropriate setting.

8. Provide educational experiences which are needed by the child but cannot be provided in a regular classroom.

9. Be thoroughly prepared to provide instruction in the visually impaired child's areas of specific need.

The teacher of the visually impaired should not:

1. Assume responsibilities for the academic education of the child which may be better provided for in a regular classroom. This means that the teacher should not participate in a "no-failure" program by acting as an academic tutor to the extent that the child always fulfills all regular classroom responsibilities even if the teacher of the visually impaired must do the work for the child.

2. Succumb to the ever-present danger of creating an atmosphere of "learned helplessness."

3. Accept a service delivery system which does not provide enough time for each visually impaired child to receive the specific instruction needed.

The professional and interpersonal relationship between the regular classroom teacher and the teacher of the visually impaired is extremely important. It is to be hoped that in most cases the two of you will agree on a division of responsibilities that will provide the visually impaired student with opportunities for interaction with sighted peers, a comprehensive academic program, and instruction in areas of special need directly related to visual impairment. If such is not the case, however, you—the informed classroom teacher—should insist that the support services and supplementary instruction needed to make placement in the regular classroom work be provided before that placement is effected.